

Supervisor FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



I have a personality clash with my employee. I am trying to practice detaching emotionally, but I think supervisors must be careful with personality clashes. I can see how tempting it is show bias against such persons on the job.



I'm a bit irritated at the EAP for being unable to give me any information about an employee who I referred. I feel pretty handicapped not knowing more about the problem and progress. How can I do my job if I am completely in the dark?

Answers



Not every supervisor will enjoy the personality style of each employee. You are right about the need to be cautious and avoid something called "social undermining."

This refers to any behavior or attitude toward your employee with the goal of sabotaging and curtailing a person from advancing, achieving, or being recognized for what they accomplish. Social undermining is not necessarily bullying. It may be completely covert. Hindering success is the distinguishing feature of the behavior. Use the EAP to objectively assess your attitude. You may discover that certain elements of your employee's work style or personality create anxiety for you. This may be attributed to feelings like envy, jealousy, fear, and perhaps disappointment in your own achievements. These sorts of issues are usually quickly overcome with short-term counseling. The EAP is an excellent resource for such a purpose.



Privacy laws like HIPAA and federal alcohol and drug confidentiality laws (which are even stricter) govern EAP information. Without these provisions, EAPs would

become extinct or lose its value due to trust issues that might arise if employees feel their information is not protected. Your organization would then have no practical avenue for intervening with troubled employees in the early stages of their problems. When EAPs were first established in the mid-1970s, noninterference with management and administrative processes was considered key. This still holds true. Many supervisors struggle to understand this principle. Your hands are not tied with lack of personal information because management decisions are based upon observable and documented performance and conduct issues.

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



What are the best ways to help employees feel appreciated and motivated if there is no extra money to improve pay? Unfortunately, I need every employee to pull their weight, even if we don't have one extra dime.



I don't think I should reject an employee who brings a personal problem to me. There needs to be some recognition and processing of the problem for a few minutes. I think this increases the chance of the employee accepting an EAP referral later when it is recommended.



We hear a lot about how much employees experience anxiety because of work demands, technology, resource constraints, and our culture. Supervisors aren't experts on anxiety, but what can we do to help?

Answers



More money would not have a lasting impact, but the following will: 1) Periodically, praise an employee in front of others, especially if the audience includes people the employee looks up to or feels are important. 2) Keep the employee out of the dark and included or involved in organizational matters that concern his or her job. 3) Keep your eyes open for things the employee does well and make a positive comment about it. (This is called "catching the employee doing something right.") Use the same moment to ask your employee how things are going, and whether he or she needs anything from you to do their job. 4) Give an assignment or project that by its nature shows that you trust the employee with something important or significant. These four strategies will add significant job satisfaction in most instances.



You should not reject an employee who musters the courage to come to you with a personal problem. You are right, to do so would decrease the likelihood of accepting an EAP referral. Here's an approach: Listen and give some indication that you understand what is being shared. Then, 1) Praise the employee for coming to you, (i.e., "Mary, I am glad you felt comfortable coming to let me about this.") 2) Reflect what you heard or summarize. (i.e., "So, the bottom line is that your landlord is forcing you to leave and you have nowhere to go?") 3) Set the stage for referral and this logic path: (i.e. "Mary there is a lot personal information needed to help solve this problem. As your supervisor, I am not the best one to hear and retain this information, but the EAP is ideal. Can I help you arrange an appointment to see them? 4) Allow the employee to phone without delay while motivation is high.



Anxiety encompasses an array of mental health conditions, but supervisors are most likely to encounter mixed mild depression and anxiety disorders that, although distressing, aren't rigid conditions requiring long-term treatment. These include employees who are worried, fearful of their future, facing domestic work-life and caregiver challenges, financial stress, and the effects of poor sleep, strain in personal relationships, and the ability to concentrate at work. Dependability issues may exist. You may see low mood, sadness, and hear about poor sleep and appetite. You witness fits of irritability, poor concentration, and forgetfulness. Headaches may be common and aches and pains may be voiced. Heart palpitations, restlessness, and being keyed up" and "on edge" may also be problems. As these emerge, encourage use of the EAP. Always talk up confidentiality, and forget trying to talk employees out of anxiety. It doesn't work.